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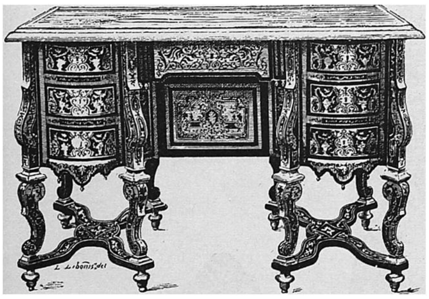
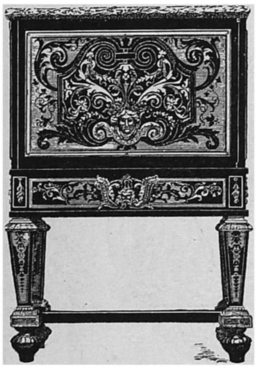


BOULE DRESSING TABLE.

FRENCH FURNITURE.

By Theodore Child.

ORNAMENTATION IN METALLIC MARQUETRY.



BOULE CABINET.

IN a previous paper we have seen the first germs of metallic incrustation in the work of certain German artists. The idea was carried out to perfection by a French artist, André Charles Boule, who was born in 1642 and who has given his name to the work of which he was the perfecter, if not the inventor. The orthography of the name is written variously, Buhl, Boulle, or Boule, or Boul as it appears in Germain Brice's "Description de la Ville de Paris," but spelling in those days was very unsettled. The correct way of writing the name appears, however, to be Boule with one "l," as it is written in several documents of the time. The name of Boule is inseparably connected with the splendors of the reign of Louis XIV. That king rose to a position in Europe such as no monarch of modern times had hitherto occupied, and the great ministers of his time had the wisdom to take special measures for the promotion and establishment in France of the various arts and manufactures in which the Flemish and Italians had previously excelled the French as well as other nations. Colbert, the minister of finance under Louis XIV., amongst his other commercial reforms, founded all kinds of learned societies and schools of art, including, in 1664, an "Académie Royale de peinture, d'architecture et de sculpture," into which the designers of architecture, woodwork, ornament or furniture were admitted. He established also the famous tapestry manufactory of the "Gobelins." It was Colbert, too, who pushed forward the completion of the royal palaces and particularly of Versailles, for the furniture of which Boule produced some of his finest work, work worthy to figure in those sumptuous galleries brilliant with looking glass, gilding, pictures and sculptures, that formed the most brilliant surroundings of the most brilliant and majestic of sovereigns. The manufacture of the carpets, the hangings, the furniture, the plate of Versailles was entrusted to veritable artists who themselves had their lodgings in the palace of the Louvre, and subsequently, in 1662, in order to establish the necessary harmony between all their various works, and to subject the individual compositions to one common thought, the king centralized the different workshops at the "Gobelins," and in 1667 placed them under the supreme direction of the painter Lebrun, whose magnificent genius inspired more or less directly the best Louis XIV. work until his death in 1690, when he was replaced by Mignard. With Mignard began the epoch of decadence, and magnificence was succeeded by fanciful prettiness and extravagances.

About Boule's life we have some information. He was born in the Louvre, where several members of his family worked for the king. He executed a great quantity of furniture for the royal châteaux and for the grand seigneurs of the court, nevertheless he was a poor financier and died in straitened circumstances. He was ruined by a fire which destroyed a part of his workshop and a splendid collection of drawings and engravings; and after this disaster he had to ask assistance of the king and died ruined in 1732, leaving three sons who had been his pupils and collaborators, but who failed to keep up the reputation of their father, whose grand traditions were kept up. however, by other disciples.

Boule was a true creator; he realized the artistic conceptions of Lebrun and invented the kind of furniture that the splendor of Versailles required. All his works, conceived in a grand style, form veritable monuments enriched with architectonic ornaments. His furniture is not the Flemish ebony cabinet with its sombre aspect; it is not the Italian cabinet overcharged with gilt ornaments and marble mosaics and tablets; it is a piece of furniture at once simple and rich whose general lines are easily seized and comprehended by the eye, and which is never commonplace.

Combining equally great talents as a designer, a modeler, a chiseler, and an inlayer, Boule enriched his furniture, the structural basis of which was ebony with panels of marquetry in wood, brass, tin, and tortoise shell, and with applications of figures in low relief and of moldings and ornaments of gilt bronze of supreme elegance and perfection of execution, arranged so as to catch the light at convenient points and to prevent the eye being dazzled by the changing reflections of the metallic incrustations.

The reader will see from the accompanying engravings the general character of Boule ornamentation, namely arabesques, foliage, attributes, etc., cut out in one material and incrusted in another, metal in tortoise shell, or vice versa. In order to obtain the desirable exactitude, Boule superposed two sheets of the same size and thickness, one in metal and one in tortoise shell, and after having traced his pattern cut out both simultaneously with the one and the same operation of the saw; he thus obtained four proofs of his composition, two in which the drawing was shown by the empty space which we might call matrices, and two proofs of figures exactly corresponding. By counterchanging these figures and matrices he obtained a ground of tortoise shell with figures in metal, and a ground of metal with figures in tortoise shell; the former called first part and the latter second part, or the "boule" and the "counter."

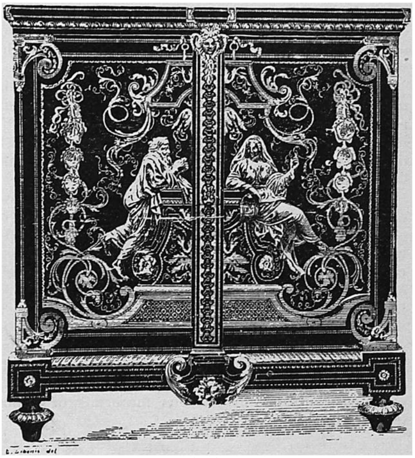
The first part is esteemed more highly than the counter for the reason that it is more complete, the metal being always engraved in the "boule," and the coldness of certain outlines corrected by elaborate and intelligent accentuation or finish; the shells trace their furrows of light, the draperies fall in cleverly disordered folds, the grotesque heads, the branches, the foliage all become animated and speaking. In the counterpart we find only the reflection of the idea, the faded shadow of the original.

In Boule work the play of light upon the surface and the variety of the curvature commonly found in different parts of the furniture, are admirably adapted to show off to advantage the rich materials employed; we always find a brilliant and lustrous effect produced upon the polished metal and remarkably beautiful tones of color obtained by the mingling of silver, brass, tortoise shell, ivory, and enamel.

In some Boule furniture in the galleries of the Louvre, wood and metallic marquetry are combined. There is one splendid *armoire* in particular, the upper panels of which are decorated with vases of flowers in wood marquetry surrounded by incrustations in metal, and the tones are so artistically combined that the brass and the tortoise shell do not overpower the wood marquetry nor does the latter attract the eye to the detriment of the other ornamental *motifs*.

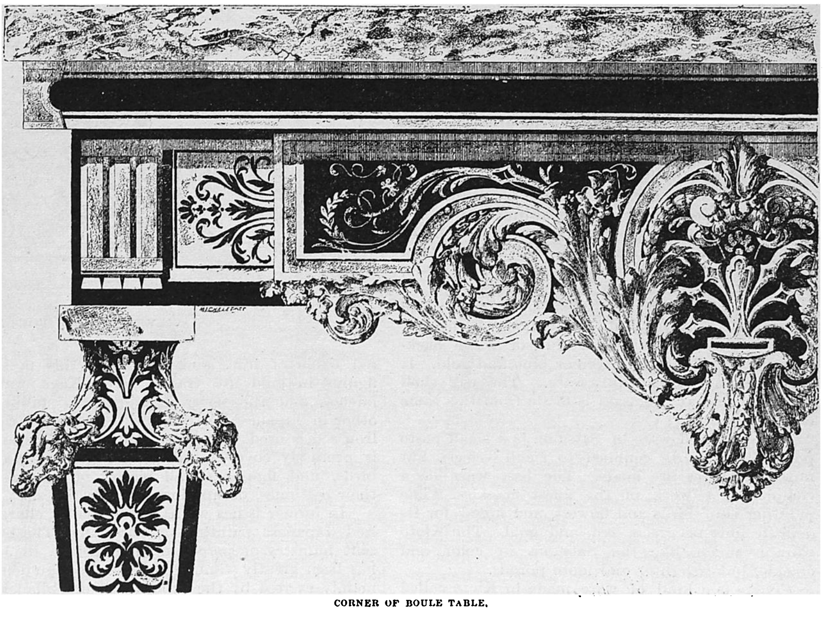
The work of Boule was almost exclusively composed of splendid cupboards, cabinets, consoles, pedestals, commodes and clock cases. Small pieces of furniture for domestic use made by Boule are very rarely found. Most of such similar work, falsely attributed to Boule, is due to his sons or his numerous pupils, to whom we will also attribute those incrustations, where the tortoise shell parts are replaced by horn, dyed blue, or vermillion, and other polychrome vagaries which continued to be produced far into the eighteenth century.

The modern so-called Boule work now largely manufactured in Paris is produced in the same manner as above described, by engraving the design on a brass plate and then sawing out positive and negative proofs only, instead of sawing two sheets at a time. The modern manufacturers saw out simultaneously ten or twenty sheets and the whole result is so rough and paltry that to call it Boule is a calumny on the name of the illustrious *ébéniste*.



BOULE CABINET.

Having seen now what are the various kinds of marquetry, let us say a few words about the materials employed and their preparation. There are, first of all, woods of all shades. Mr. Henri Havard in a recent work on furniture, enumerates no less than seventy-four species suited for fine cabinet work and marquetry such as amaranth, lemon, copaiba (Brazil), red and green ebony (Madagascar), Campêcte, Lapire (West Indies), red sandal wood, maple, mahogany, black ebony, etc., which comprise a whole gamut of color from white



CORNER OF BOULE TABLE.

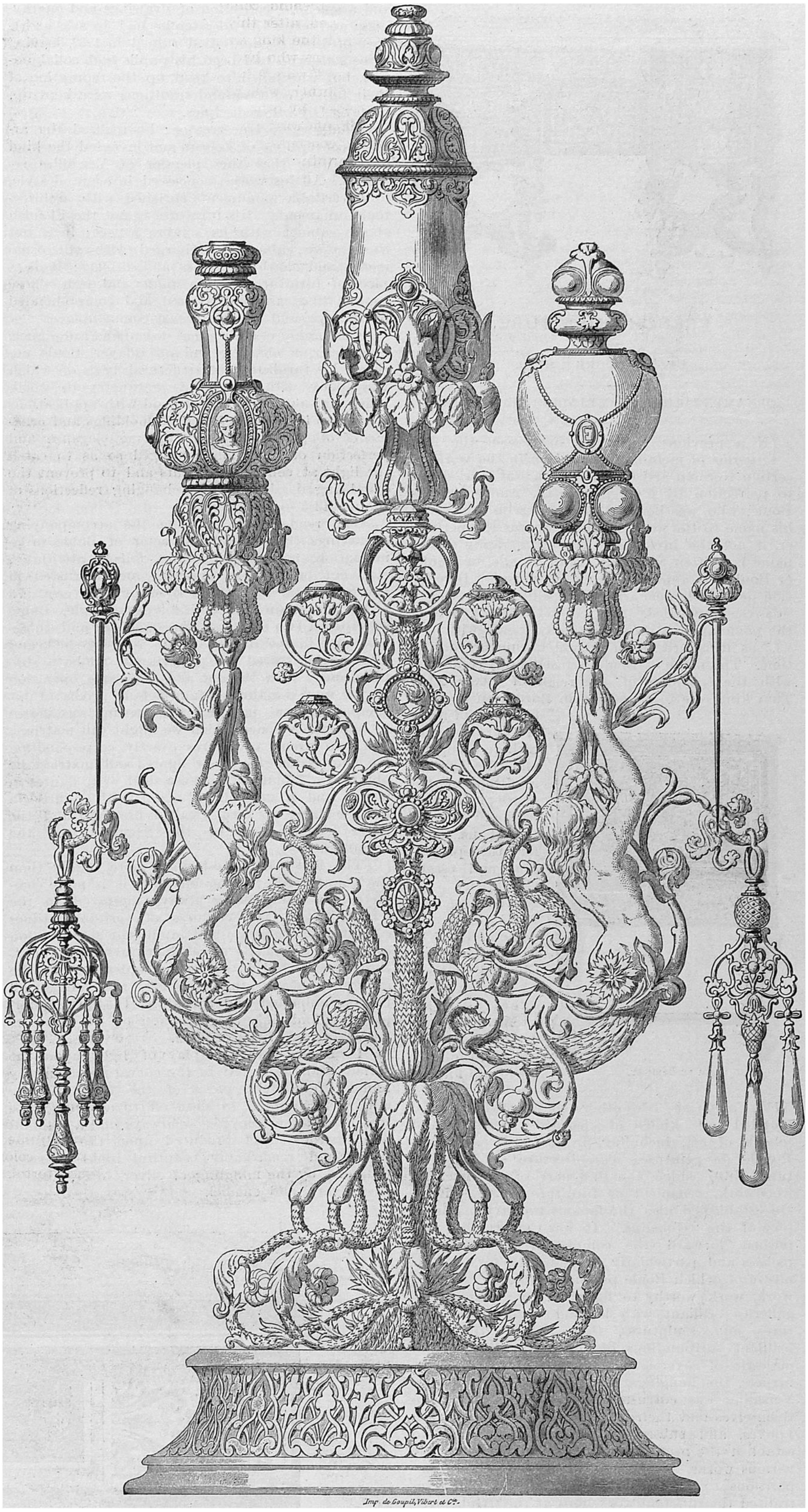
to black. Then besides the woods the materials used for marquetry are tortoise shell, horn, ivory, mother of pearl, brass, tin or *étain*, silver and gold.

Each of these materials requires the most delicate manipulation. Tortoise shell is generally of several tones at once, blonde, brown and almost black, some shell is speckled and other is iridescent like mother of pearl. The tortoise shell is flattened by steeping in hot water and subsequent pressure. Then when the sheets are of the requisite thickness, a coat of color is applied on the underside, either vermillion, green, blue, or lamp black, and over the coat of color a sheet of paper. The shell thus flattened and prepared is ready to be sawn up. Ivory and mother of pearl are prepared for marquetry in the same way as for other industries.

The brass employed in marquetry is of different tones and takes different names. The coppery red brass is called *rosette;* the yellow brass, copper mixed with one third of natural oxyde of zinc, is called *laiton.* The gold employed in marquetry is rendered malleable by alloying it with copper. The white, red, yellow and green gold produce fine effects in combination with mother of pearl and tortoise shell. *Etain* or pewter is also alloyed with brass to give it hardness. Its cold tones, like those of silver, render excellent service in contrast with the warm tones of gold or tortoise shell, as may be seen in the work of Boule, who used it very largely.

The combinations of all these materials in marquetry work are further beautified and enriched by being engraved with the needle. The *tailles* or incisions are filled in with black varnish or resin which renders the engraving visible, and the whole surface is then polished or burnished.

Such are the means which the French have employed, and still employ, to add to the effects of color in furniture, and when these means have been employed by men of perfect taste, like Boule himself, the results have been splendid. The example of Boule is a warning to all who wish to imitate or emulate him; they must have taste, a sure eye for color, immense experience in design and in the capacities of their material, and above all their work must be of the most consummately fine execution, of perfect purity of outline, and, in short, worthy of the precious materials of which it is composed.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SILVER STAND FOR JEWELS. A PARISIAN NOVELTY.

PORCELAIN INDUSTRY OF JAPAN.

JAPAN is particularly favored for the production of porcelain, as throughout the islands at numerous points nature has mixed the fusible and infusible materials in all the various proportions required for different grades of the manufactured material. In proportion as silica predominates, the ware is translucent, light, and brittle, and in proportion as alumina prevails the ware increases in weight, opacity and cohesion.

In the best ware there is from 70 to 80 per cent. of silicious or fusible matter, and from 15 to 18 per cent. of alumina or infusible matter. The clays are powdered by water power or by hand, and then decanted, dried, and stored. The shaping is done on the potter's wheel, a sharp curved knife being used. The kilns are built on hill sides, and have the peculiarity that they are connected, and whilst each kiln has its own firing place, the draft from the lower kilns is communicated to the upper ones, which are accordingly more intensely heated.

The glaze is from silicious clay and potash. The painting varies in the different districts. The coloring oxides are those of copper, cobalt, iron, antimony, manganese, and gold, the desired colors being produced by different temperatures.

Among the manufactures is the beautiful blue and white Owari ware, the painting on which consists of branches of trees, grass, flowers, birds, and insects, copied from nature with rare skill; of late years this ware has been made in blue, green, and gold.

In the Eurari ware, the surface of the vessel is generally divided into medallions or figures, which alternately have red, blue, or white background, with figures in green or blue and gold. It is a strikingly beautiful ware. The egg shell porcelain sold at Nagasaki is made from this same clay.

The crackled ware of Satsuma is a small paste porcelain, formerly confined to small vessels, but now large vases are made. The best ware has a complete net work of the finest crackles. The painting is of birds and flowers, and noted for its delicate lines of green, red, and gold. The Kioto ware is much like the Satsuma in color and crackle, but is lighter and more porous.

There is a kind of ware made in Kioto called eraku, the whole body of which is covered with a red oxide of iron, and then over this mythical figures in gold are traced. The Kaga ware is faience, and the style of painting is unlike any other in Japan. For colors a light sesquioxide of iron red is used with green and gold. The surface is profusely covered with trees, grasses, flowers, birds, and figures of all classes of people with their costumes, occupations, and pastimes.

In former issues we have sufficiently characterized Japanese painting on porcelain. The important industry of porcelain manufacture in Japan has been greatly stimulated by the foreign demand, mainly excited by the expositions of Philadelphia, Paris and Vienna.

THE crazy quilt of 1884 is a wonderful development, with its height of curiosity not yet attained. It combines landscapes and faces painted on satin, outline figures in embroidery, Kate Greenaway painted figures, cat tails solidly embroidered, spider's webs, butterflies, gorgeous birds, fans, storks, and other designs wrought on pieces of every shape and hue, feather-stitched or stitched in some fantastic manner together, and the four sides of the medley in silk bordered by a large cord with cone-shaped tassels at the corners. The date appears on a panel at the center as well as the initials of the maker in gold.